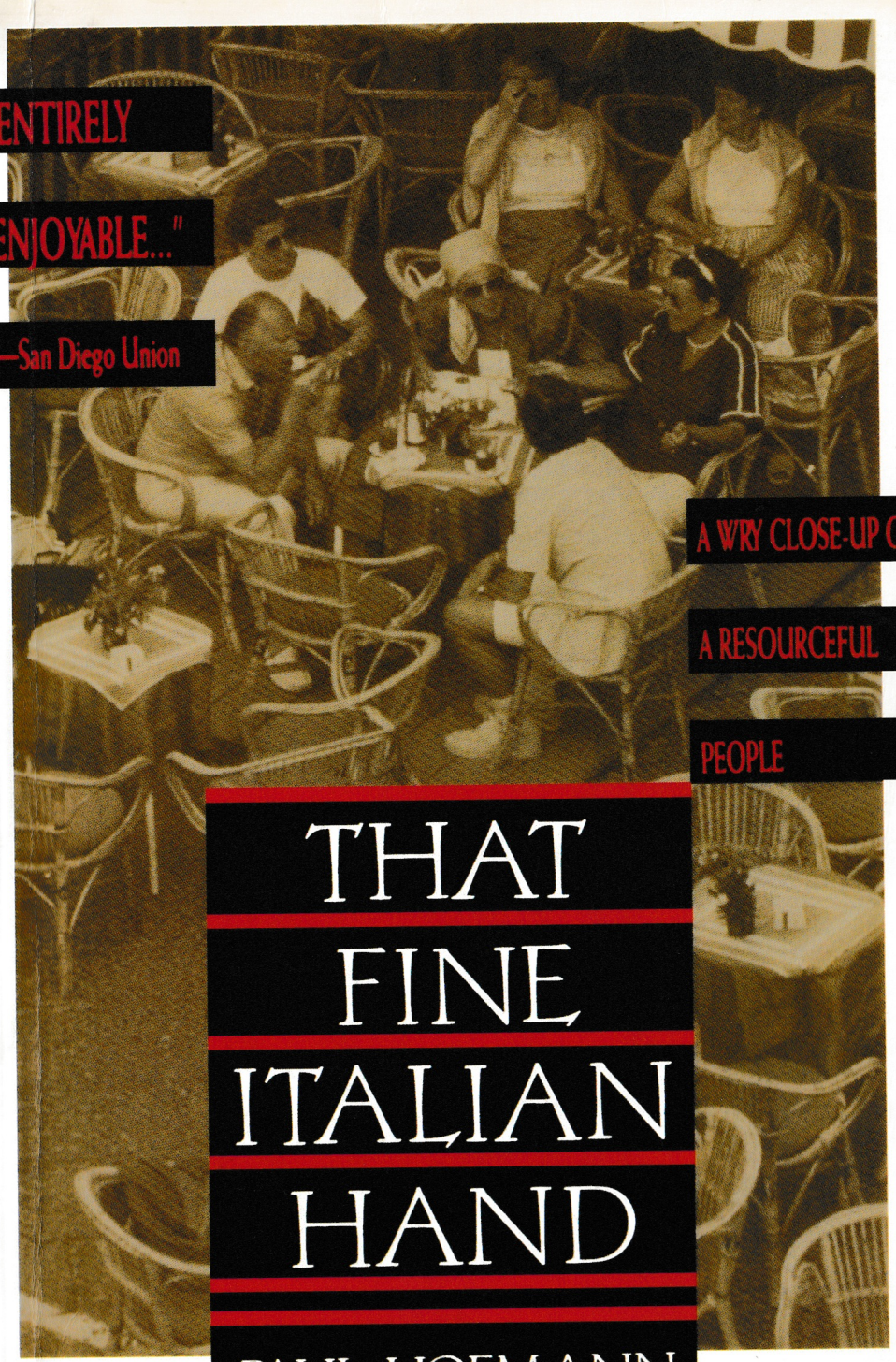
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THAT FINE ITALIAN HAND

PAUL HOFMANN

TRAVEL

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■ ■ ■

Paul Hofmann was for many years chief of the *New York Times* bureau in Rome. A resident of Italy on and off since World War II, he now lives in Rome, writing articles and books. The most recent, *Cento Città*, a guide to Italy's smaller cities and towns, is now an Owl paperback (Holt, 1990).

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PAUL HOFMANN

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INTRODUCTION

Italy has attracted visitors since the earliest times of Western civilization. First came barbarian invaders who craved the lush South and its riches. They were followed by Saracen plunderers; northern pilgrims to the tombs of the Apostles in Rome; sages like Montaigne who toured the peninsula's spas and, "only to distract myself," made a point of looking at the courtesans in Venice, Florence, and Rome; English lords on their grand tour; Goethe, Stendhal, Byron, Ruskin, and Henry James; an endless line of artists from Dürer to Henry Moore; honeymooners from all over Europe and the Americas; and today's package tours from the United States and Japan.

The foreigner coming to Italy is baffled by conflicting impressions. "Sunny" Italy, especially Milan or Venice, may be shrouded in fog; an early spring week in such a celebrated resort as Taormina in Sicily may be rained out. Hotel guests in a presumedly quiet place off the beaten track, like Urbino, are kept awake half the night because of the whining motor scooters and roaring motorcycles in the street. Museums and churches that one wanted to see are closed. Airports look like refugee camps whenever one of the frequent strikes occurs, and railroad trains may be overcrowded and late when they

are not halted by engineers clamoring for the same job conditions as airline pilots enjoy.

The tender contours of the Tuscan hills, with their villas, cypresses, and vineyards, and other beauty spots up and down the peninsula and on the islands, the majestic ruins from antiquity, the cathedrals and palaces, the lovely piazzas will nevertheless enchant the traveler. "All soft and mellow," as Henry James wrote. At mealtime almost any trattoria will provide a haven with tasty food and a genial atmosphere.

A visitor to Italy will be struck by how easy it is to communicate with most Italians. They are outgoing and articulate, ready to smile and engage in small talk or gossip. In conversation "one quickly reaches a note of intimacy in Italy, and speaks about personal matters," Stendhal noted. A simple request for directions by a traveler who hardly knows a dozen Italian words often loosens a cascade of explanations. Verbose many Italians tend to be, but they also make friends easily with strangers whom they met only half an hour earlier.

When Dickens visited the country in 1844, he was enthralled by the amiability amid all the "Italian shabbiness" he saw—"the smiling face of the attendant, man or woman; the courteous manner; the lighthearted, pleasant, simple air." He praised his Italian *corriere*, or travel manager, who struck up conversations with everyone they met along their route, won the sympathy of innkeepers and maidservants in a matter of minutes, managed to whip up a splendid meal in a kitchen in which he had never set foot before, and the morning after was able to entertain the famous author "with the private histories and family affairs of the whole party" with whom they had been traveling. A foreigner on a train trip or bus tour in present-day Italy might collect similar vignettes.

Most Italians underline what they are saying with eloquent gestures in the Mediterranean way of illustrating spoken words with the hands. Watch that manual language

when some conversation takes place behind the plate-glass windows of a store or café. Even though you cannot hear what is being said and don't know whether the voices sound cordial or angry, you may be able to guess the drift of the dialogue from the play of the hands—who is persuasive and who skeptical, who wants to convey good faith (placing his hands on his chest) and who is accusing (pointing her forefinger at the other's face).

Some common Italian gestures will at first puzzle the newcomer: The thumb joined with the forefinger and middle finger while the hand is slowly shaken from a limp wrist expresses uncertainty, disbelief, or urgent inquiry. Striking the edges of one's hands together in a crosslike pattern means "I am off" or "Let's beat it!" Such manual messages probably go back to prehistory. The famous orators of antiquity reinforced the effect of their rhetoric with ample movements of their arms and hands, as prosecutors and defense counsel in southern courtrooms still do today.

Equally ancient are the multiform tactile skills of the Italians, their versatility and mastery in shaping, carving, crafting, refining, drawing, styling, painting, and lettering. Today's designers of elegant car bodies and casual wear are heirs to a long tradition that embraces the pottery and tomb frescoes of the Etruscans and the anatomical and engineering drawings by Leonardo da Vinci—indeed a host of celebrated or anonymous artists and artisans going back three thousand years.

The penmanship of Italian Renaissance scribes and copyists before printing became generalized—their "fine Italian hand"—was admired throughout Europe; Western handwriting as taught to first-graders today developed from early fourteenth-century Florentine cursive, a pencraft for speedily copying ancient manuscripts. The phrase *fine Italian hand* has long meant the particular way Italians like to do things, pre-

ferring adroitness to sheer force. Although the expression originally was a tribute to proverbial dexterity, ironical overtones suggesting manipulation and craftiness can now be detected whenever the "fine Italian hand" is mentioned.

There is another phrase that any visitor to Italy will soon hear—*all'italiana*, "the Italian way" or "Italian-style." It is no encomium, and the tactful foreigner should avoid it. Local people who are kept waiting in some office for an hour only to be told that the official they want to see has just knocked off for lunch will mutter "service *all'italiana.*" *All'italiana* means haphazard, tacky, poorly improvised, confused, also shifty and underhanded. The newspapers all the time denounce things *all'italiana*—political decisions papering over conflicts without solving the underlying problems, bureaucratic idiocies, the mails that need a week or longer to deliver a letter to an address in the same city, or a criminal procedure that keeps defendants in jail for years and eventually frees them "for lack of evidence," without any compensation or apology.

Although the Italians, like other peoples, resent censures by foreigners, they have developed an uncommon proclivity for self-criticism, as their newspapers and everyday conversations prove. Italians are generally convinced that in other countries the judges are more impartial, government officials more honest and competent, businesspeople and workers more reliable, and the police more efficient. (Understandably, whenever Italians go abroad and run into corruption, bumbling, or fraud, they are astonished and disappointed, and will resignedly say, *"Tutto il mondo è paese,"* an adage that may be rendered as "People are all alike and things are rotten all over the world.")

This book is an attempt to exemplify how the "fine Italian hand" operates: the hand manner *all'italiana*, by one who has been observing it for most of his life.

I saw Italy for the first time as a hitchhiker after my freshman year at the University of Vienna. There were not yet a great many cars on the highways of the peninsula, but I did get picked up by some trucks; most of the time I walked. I spent nights in the diocesan seminary of Udine, in a monastery at Adria, in a farmer's barn at a village between Ferrara and Bologna oddly called Malalbergo (bad hotel), in similar places elsewhere, and in cheap inns. If there were any youth hostels then, I didn't find them. I met peasants, truck drivers, friars, nuns, soldiers, villagers, and townspeople, and was surprised by how sarcastically many of them talked about Mussolini's Fascist regime, then in its heyday. It helped that I had been learning Italian as a subscriber to a mail-order language course, but I encountered some difficulty grasping what was being said to me in Venetian or Ligurian dialect. From my first day I was captivated by the nearly general pleasantness, despite much poverty.

I returned to Italy a few times after that summer and eventually, having witnessed Hitler's triumphant entry into Vienna, moved from my native city to Rome. Self-exiled, I did not think of myself as being uprooted. From the very beginning I felt at home. My first job in Rome was in a third-class hotel near the railroad terminal, owned and run by a Sicilian who, as I found out only much later, was the godfather of an Agrigento Mafia family. I remember him as a droll and genial employer, who called the young, penniless foreigner he had hired as a receptionist Don Paul, pronouncing my first name the French way, the "don" being a Sicilian mark of esteem that neither my age nor any accomplishments warranted. After a few months I was able to resume work as a newspaperman. Following Italy's entry into World War II as an ally of Hitler, I was drafted into the German army.

I underwent basic training with an armored battalion in Bavaria and was sent to the Mediterranean Theater as an army

interpreter with the simulated rank of sergeant. I saw Rome during Mussolini's downfall in July 1943 and under Nazi occupation. I kept in touch with the Italian anti-Nazi underground and was able to shed the hated Nazi uniform on the heady day of Rome's liberation by the Allied forces in June 1944. Shortly afterward I joined the staff of *The New York Times.* As a reporter and foreign correspondent, I served in the United States and in some forty other countries on all continents, but I always returned to Italy and eventually became chief of the Rome bureau of the *Times.*

I have visited all of Italy's ninety-five provinces (some may soon be subdivided), many of them often, and have spent varying periods in most of the country's major cities. I have seen Italy's quick transformation after World War II from a predominantly rural society into a modern industrial nation, neck and neck with Britain and France, and not too far behind West Germany in annual economic output.

While I was an on-and-off resident, Rome doubled in size; it now has a population of about 3 million, like Chicago. Milan has become a fashion and design center, an international beacon of taste and modernity. Most other Italian cities have grown impressively too. A remarkable exception is Venice, whose population shrank during the last few decades by at least one-third, to 80,000. The spread of urban areas (including Mestre on the Venetian mainland, administratively a part of the city of Venice with 250,000 inhabitants), the proliferation of second homes in the countryside and along the beaches that came with prosperity, the 4,000-mile network of roads built since the 1950s, the many new hotels and thousands of industrial plants all have covered much of Italy with layer upon layer of concrete, profoundly changing the scenery and environment.

Noble Florence has spawned unsightly new suburbs stretching across the northwestern plain toward Prato. Lom-

bardy has become a clutter of factories that foul the region's air and rivers. Rome is ringed with a broad belt of mean new housing. Southern cities like Naples, Reggio di Calabria, Catania, and Palermo have become urban disasters in their incomparable natural settings. And garish hotels, villas, and condominiums have been closing in on the august Greek temples of Paestum and Agrigento.

All the time looters are despoiling Etruscan tombs and other archaeological troves, art thieves are plundering churches and museums, and many famous collections can be visited only at odd hours because they lack funds and personnel. Every now and then some foreign institution proudly displays a Greek sculpture or some other acquisition that probably has been smuggled out of Italy: There will be an outcry in the Italian media, and magistrates will open an inquiry, but the public is not told that the presumed theft was in all likelihood carried out by local specialists and facilitated by inadequate safeguards, and that the storerooms of Italian museums and galleries bulge with works of art and ancient artifacts that are rarely or never shown. Nobody has ever drawn up a complete inventory of the country's immense cultural riches.

Italy is slightly smaller than Japan, numbering less than half of that country's population, yet some of its metropolitan areas seem as congested as the Tokyo-Yokohama-Osaka corridor. The rickety Italian system of public transportation forces legions of commuters into their cars every working day to battle thrombotic rush-hour traffic. Italy is today among the world's most motorized countries, with 390 cars for every 1,000 inhabitants, as compared with 400 in West Germany and 460 in the United States; individual Italians spend more on their autos than do any other Europeans. The hill towns of Tuscany and Umbria are hemmed in by thickets of service stations and car repair shops.

After many years of living in Rome I have, I am told, adjusted to the local driving habits by practicing the blend of defensive maneuvering and cunning that is an Italian motorist's mental survival kit. I need a strong espresso in the morning and a few times later in the day; I eat plenty of pasta, vegetables, and fruits; and I prefer olive oil to any other fat (the now-vaunted "Mediterranean diet"); I also drink wine moderately with my meals and am not averse to a brief siesta. I have acquired Italian relatives with whom I speak in their language, and I sometimes dream in Italian.

Yet I am not an Italian. This fact will explain the conflicting feelings this book may mirror—affection for the country and its hospitable people, to whom I owe much gratitude, and a stranger's occasional irritation at local peculiarities that natives accept without questioning, including some sleights of that fine Italian hand. Longtime foreign residents who profess to be, and are considered, *italianisants* will sometimes confide to visitors from abroad that Italy would be a splendid country—its natural beauty, the climate, the food, the architecture and the art!—if only it weren't populated by Italians. This is an old, stale chestnut, served up with slight variations by expatriates in host countries from Mexico to the nations of East Asia.

Italy may no longer be the "paradise of exiles" of which Shelley wrote in Venice in 1819. The recent refugees from Eastern European countries generally consider it a transit place and try to reach the Western Hemisphere or Australia as soon as possible. Some expatriates who years ago thought they had found the perfect haven in Italy are also moving on or at least talk about leaving.

The bustling and at times disconcerting country that Italy is today is no quaint idyll or permanent comedy or aesthete's dream. It must be taken on the Italians' own terms. It is essentially the product of a smiling nature and of the keen

minds and skilled hands of the Italians who through the centuries tilled the land; cut down (alas!) most of the forests; built the towns and cities (and rebuilt them after each of many calamities); laid out the highways, canals, railroads, and *autostrade*; and created an artistic patrimony without paragon on earth.

The same resilience that enabled the Italian people to survive the recurrent catastrophes their country endured in the course of its turbulent history was displayed after the disaster of World War II. It was a tribute to both Italy's past and the nation's recent show of vitality that the birth certificate of the European Community was issued and signed in Rome in 1957. A confederation based on the Rome Protocols, Western Europe with its Mediterranean appendages is today bidding for superpower status, and the Italians, senior partners in the grouping, are among the staunchest advocates of further integration and cooperation within the Community. That fine Italian hand is helping also to shape European dealings with the world at large. At the same time Italy—at least the country's North—is quickly becoming more "European" than it used to be. The future of the country's South remains its biggest problem and challenge.

We begin with this fundamental division of the country.

That Fine Italian Hand

1.

The Two Italies



The traveler journeying from Italy's North to the South passes from the Alps through the broad Po Valley before gentle, tidy Tuscany and the green slopes of Umbria yield to a more sullen landscape in the lower Tiber Valley, with high mountains—the wilds of the Abruzzi—to the east. After Rome, palms and orange trees come into sight, and the roads and railroad tracks are bordered with prickly-pear shrubs. The sea, where it is visible, seems a deeper blue than in the North. Naples looks much more crowded, disorderly, and scruffy than Milan or Bologna. The state railroads management seems to have sent all of its superannuated coaches and sleepers to the South, and they are not only old but also dirty. The motorist is warned to be doubly careful while driving through, say, Brindisi or Catania: At intersections gangs of young hoodlums might break car windows to snatch bags.

Palermo may be the only city in Europe where buildings bombed out during World War II were not yet repaired or replaced by the late 1980s—not because the ruins at the center of the island capital were meant as a memorial but because nobody had gotten around to eliminating the eyesores. In the espresso bars and piazzas of southern cities and towns, groups of youths who have nothing else to do hang out for many

hours every day, languidly talking about girls or the performance of the local soccer team. Naples is as chaotic as Cairo, and many of its neighborhoods are outright squalid, yet the Napoli soccer club easily raises a few million dollars to buy another famous Brazilian or Argentinian player who will help it maintain its standing in the first division of the national soccer league or even recapture the dizzying triumph of 1987, when the team won the Italian championship, defeating the clubs from the rich North.

In rocky Calabria or in Sicily, some hill towns look like the white medinas of the Arab cities on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean. But in the slums of Reggio di Calabria or Trapani, new Mercedeses or BMWs may be seen plowing through the teeming, narrow lanes, and Filipino maids look out from the steel grilles of pretentious villas on the sprawling outskirts of Cosenza or Agrigento.

This is the Mezzogiorno. The word means "midday," also "land of the midday sun." The region runs down the Italian peninsula south of an imaginary line somewhere between Rome and Naples to about Ancona on the Adriatic Sea, and it includes Sicily. To romantic foreigners *Mezzogiorno* may conjure up visions of a land drenched in the light and heat of the high noon; Greek ruins; Mount Vesuvius and Mount Etna surmounted by plumes of smoke when they are not belching lava in the periodic eruptions of Europe's only active volcanoes (although Vesuvius has long been dormant, and few people think of the junior volcanoes on the islands of Vulcano and Stromboli); golden oranges and robust wines; outdoor life all year round until late into the night, when the strumming of mandolins may be heard; good-looking men and sensual women; *dolce far niente*. To Italians in the North, Mezzogiorno also means Mafia, appalling crime statistics, economic stagnation, an alien mentality, clannish and feudal, a reservoir of future policemen and government officials for the

entire country, and a permanent burden to be shouldered by the taxpayer.

Northern and Central Italy on the one hand and the Mezzogiorno on the other are in fact two distinct cultures and societies that have much in common but are also divided by many things. Instead of becoming more closely integrated, they appear to be drifting further apart—the North becoming more "European," the South more Mediterranean or Oriental. Many northerners would today assign the national capital, Rome, to the Mezzogiorno rather than to their "European" portion of Italy.

True, all Italians from the Alps to Sicily want their pasta al dente, watch the same television programs, and vote for the same political parties in the national elections, when usually an astounding 90 percent or so of the enfranchised population go to the polls without any coercion. Most Italian men and quite a few women follow the soccer championships with passion. Northerners and southerners drink espresso, hum the same pop songs, and read the same kinds of newspapers and magazines. It is hard to tell southerners from northerners before they open their mouths and identify themselves by accent or dialect. There are tall, lanky, blond, horse-faced Sicilians who look like Britons and may be descended from their island's Norman overlords of the twelfth century; and there are short, chubby, black-haired and dark-eyed Florentines and Mantuans whose bloodlines may go back to the Etruscans. How people tackle life—that is what distinguishes Northern Italy from the Mezzogiorno.

Take teenagers in a place like Bergamo or Parma or Siena today. Asked what they intend to do with themselves, most of them will answer "make money." They want to become architects, engineers, or physicians, go into industry or public relations, perhaps start their own businesses one day. Young men and women of the same age in Catanzaro or Caltanis-

setta will think of becoming lawyers or teachers if their parents can afford their schooling. Until quite recently, teaching was the only profession that a southern girl was allowed to choose if she did not want to stay in her parents' home until marriage and raise a family afterward; for a Calabrian or Sicilian woman to work in an office or some other job was long felt to be faintly immoral—she would be in touch with a lot of men who weren't her husband!

Poorer southern males who meet the height and literacy qualifications can always enlist in one of the nation's several police forces. (Few northerners care to.) The foremost goal in life for many young people in the South is to land some job in the state bureaucracy. It pays little, but it provides security and a shred of prestige, even power. Prestige and power are highly valued in the Mezzogiorno. The old men who sit on chairs in the street of a Sicilian town outside some tawdry storefront "Club of Notables," drinking coffee or wine and watching what's going on in the neighborhood, may wear rumpled suits and cloth caps, and not have shaved for a couple of days, but they will be greeted with deference by passersby—even by the elegant chief of the local bank branch, the parish priest, and the carabinieri sergeant. Before every election, candidates from the provincial capital or even from Palermo or Rome will seek these men out and humbly ask for their support; youngsters in need of a job, or their fathers, will try to catch these men's eyes and maybe talk to them. The old men wield influence in mysterious ways, are able to settle disputes, get some girl hired by the post office, and swing hundreds of votes for a politician. My mafioso employer at the hotel near the railroad terminal in Rome was dressed so badly that unwary foreigners who entered our cramped lobby mistook him for a menial, yet the guests arriving from Agrigento and the nearby towns treated him with marked respect, even awe.

Today many influential southerners wear diamond rings, ride in flashy cars, have offices with computers and blond secretaries. Still, the important thing in the South is not so much wealth and ostentation but power. It does not necessarily have to be Mafia power, with the veiled threat that anyone opposing it may get killed. What is common to these relationships based on prestige and influence is that they seem to belong to an archaic world of lord and vassal, patron and follower. Such ties, an intangible reality throughout the Mezzogiorno, are called *clientela*; the word has come down straight from the Latin of Cicero. *Clientela*, that web of connections between influential personages and hangers-on, of favors rendered and due, is what distinguishes the society of the Mezzogiorno from that of Northern and Central Italy, where the individual does not need to fawn on some *capo* (although it never hurts).

The cultural differences between the industrial North and the still semifeudal South of Italy are so deep that sociologists have spoken of "two nations." I prefer to view Italy as a system of two interlocking cultures and societies. What, then, is *the* Italian nation?

Metternich, who is always quoted in this context, could still say that "Italy is a geographical expression," meaning that there is no such thing as an Italian nation. Large parts of the country had, in fact, been subjected to foreign domination for centuries by Metternich's time. Italian as spoken in Tuscany had slowly been recognized as the linguistic standard, but the populace in other regions clung to their local dialects: The Sicilian could not understand the Venetian or Piedmontese, and vice versa. A common idiom, as distinct from stilted book Italian, has developed only recently through films, radio, and television. It is essentially a mixture of Tuscan and the Roman vernacular; the circumstance that the national capital is also the center of the Italian film industry and

houses the headquarters of the state broadcasting system has helped Roman accents and expressions slip into everyday speech throughout the country.

Not only has television influenced and unified the way the Italians speak today, it has also exercised an immeasurable cultural impact. It has even helped change the country's laws: The courtroom episodes of the American television serials that Italian networks buy and rebroadcast continuously have acquainted provincial audiences with the oratorical and procedural duels between prosecutor and defense counsel that mark criminal trials in the United States. To Italians, this adversary system based on common law has been a fascinating novelty; their country's penal procedures are derived from Roman law, giving the prosecution preponderance. When the Italian Parliament in 1988 passed legislation introducing features of the Anglo-Saxon system of criminal justice, including a broader possibility for cross-examination in court, lawmakers and lawyers spoke about the new "Perry Mason trial." Italians, finding themselves defendants or witnesses in a court of law for the first time in their lives, addressed the presiding judge as *"Vostro Onore,"* the video translation of "Your Honor." This is not the way to speak to an Italian magistrate, who expects to be called "Mr. President" or "Your Excellency." Often the smiling or annoyed judge would tell the defendant: "You are not Perry Mason, and we are not on TV here!"

Roman law is one of the many historic strands that interlace the fabric of Italian national identity. Reminiscences of the Roman Empire and the cultural heritage from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance have always made educated Italians aware, however dimly, of common bonds and a common destiny. To the masses of the population in Northern Italy who had been living in several distinct states for hundreds of years, Napoleon gave the first brief taste of a unified Italy,

albeit one held within his French Empire and with his viceroy in Milan.

During the Italians' nineteenth-century struggle for liberation from foreign rule and for national unity—the Risorgimento—plots were hatched, secret societies founded, uprisings organized and quelled, diplomatic intrigues spun, battles won and lost. Yet French and Prussian military help was needed to achieve, at last, the political unification of 1860 to 1870. The Risorgimento was in the main a movement of political and intellectual elites. Byron, who lived for years in Italy, sympathized with them but did not take them too seriously. In his diary he noted that the well-to-do young people who were members of the outlawed Carbonari alternated between conspiratorial activities and hunting parties. (*Carbonari*—meaning "coal burners," people living in the forests—was a romantic name assumed by secret revolutionary groups in the early nineteenth century.) The masses of the population, particularly the farmers, were apathetic and played almost no role in the Risorgimento. Surveying the last few centuries, Luigi Barzini, Jr., has pointed out the "mediocre quality of Italian history."

At the height of the Risorgimento, in May 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi, already famous as a guerrilla leader in South America and Italy, sailed with 1,162 volunteers (The Thousand) from Genoa to the Mezzogiorno. He used the word *Mezzogiorno* in a letter to an associate, Biagio Caranti, on the eve of his fateful expedition. Officially the Mezzogiorno was then known as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and embraced the realm of the Bourbon kings who had reigned in Naples since 1816. The Thousand, many of them wearing the red shirts that Garibaldi had fancied since his days in Latin America, landed near Marsala, at the westernmost tip of Sicily. Four months later Garibaldi was the master of the entire Mezzogiorno: The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had toppled

like a rotten tree, its soldiers laying down their weapons or going over to The Thousand. Garibaldi styled himself The Dictator and for a few dizzying months wielded supreme power, first from Palermo and then from the former royal palace at Caserta near Naples (where he slept like a soldier, on his saddle, covered by a coarse blanket).

The romantic flavor of the enterprise undertaken by The Thousand brought Alexandre Dumas, the celebrated author of *The Three Musketeers*, to the scene; he joined Garibaldi in Sicily and followed him to Naples, where The Dictator named him director of the city's museums and the excavations in Pompeii. Dumas *père* was to spend four years in Naples, where he published a liberal newspaper, *L'Indipendente*.

In the autumn of 1860 King Victor Emmanuel II, the ruler of Piedmont and Sardinia, in whose name (and with whose connivance) Garibaldi had attacked the southern kingdom, proclaimed himself king of Italy. The quick and easy conquest of Sicily and the southern part of the peninsula had shown how ripe the Mezzogiorno had been for takeover by the dynamic North. National unification was almost completed—except for the Italians still under Austrian rule in the Alps and Trieste—when the king's *bersaglieri* (sharpshooters), sporting rooster feathers on their helmets, stormed into papal Rome in 1870 without encountering any resistance. Pope Pius IX proclaimed himself a "prisoner in the Vatican," and his priests and their followers boycotted the new unified state for decades. The papacy was not to make peace with Italy until 1929, when Mussolini, in the Lateran Treaties, paid it off for church properties seized nearly sixty years earlier and carved a tiny sovereign entity, the State of Vatican City, out of Rome.

Upper-class enthusiasm for the Risorgimento faded after 1870. The practical problems of nationhood had to be tack-

led, and the exhortation of the Piedmontese prime minister and writer Massimo d'Azeglio, "Italy is made, now let us make the Italians!" became a common catchphrase, though translating it into reality proved arduous. Although Italy's North and South had been politically united, their cultural, economic, and social differences remained. At the end of the nineteenth century and during the first two decades of the twentieth, nationalistic politicians and intellectuals whipped up Italian chauvinism rather than focus on the nation's North-South tensions. And Mussolini duly reinforced that chauvinism.

The experience of World War II was sobering, however, and today, well over a century after national unification, Italians are no longer flag wavers. Many of them seem not even sure whether their country's tricolor (adopted during the Risorgimento) is green-white-red (the correct sequence) or red-white-green. Whenever homeowners put flags out of their apartment windows—as happens almost exclusively on days when the national soccer eleven plays against a foreign team—the colors are often reversed. Army barracks and other military installations fly the tricolor daily, but schools, factories, department stores, and service stations, which in many countries routinely display the national colors, almost never do so in Italy. Even government members and other high officials have only lately taken to adorning their offices with their country's flag, and then only because they have seen it done in Washington and other capitals.

Today's Italy incorporates a few ethnic minorities—French-speaking inhabitants of the Aosta Valley, German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol, Slovenians in the Trieste area—yet the biggest minority is not ethnic but cultural: the people of the Mezzogiorno.

Whenever the lingering backwardness of the Deep South is discussed, educated Southern Italians will usually remind

one that their land saw a brilliant civilization 2,500 years ago. Greek settlers had built large urban centers and religious shrines; city states like Taras (now Taranto), Syracuse, and Akragas (now Agrigento) were flourishing; Sybaris, at the spot in the instep of the Italian boot where the small town of Sibari today perpetuates the name, was a Greek byword for "sybaritic" luxury. To the inhabitants of mainland Greece and the Greek islands, Greater Greece (in Latin *Magna Graecia*) beyond the Ionian Sea was the golden West—a new world and fabled land where traders and adventurers could quickly make a fortune and where artists and intellectuals from the old Greek cities would find eager audiences and disciples. Pythagoras, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Plato visited at various times what is now called the Mezzogiorno in much the same way European artists and scholars tour the United States today. The philosopher Empedocles belonged to the ruling clan of Akragas and, according to legend, ended his life by throwing himself into the crater of Mount Etna. Archimedes, the greatest mathematician of antiquity, was a native of Syracuse; he was slain when Roman soldiers looted the once-powerful city in 212 B.C.

Under Roman rule the Deep South became an expanse of enormous farming estates, the latifundia, where a slave population worked the soil, enabling the absentee landlords to regale themselves in Rome. Then came raids and invasions by Germanic tribes and centuries of domination by Byzantines and Arabs, and by Norman, German, French, and Spanish rulers. Feudal barons and chieftains, and eventually the viceroys and officials of the kings in Naples, maintained a flimsy surface control while vast stretches of Sicily, Calabria, and Basilicata slipped into near barbarism. Banditry and clannish vendettas were for many centuries everyday occurrences. (They have not been completely rooted out even now. An old blood feud between the Raso-Albanese and Facchineri

families in the town of Cittanova in Calabria resulted in fourteen murders during just fifty-five days in 1987; by 1989 the toll of those killed had reached fifty-nine.) Christianity survived in the Mezzogiorno only by making compromises with the archaic superstitions of the populace.

Most of the great Italians, from St. Francis of Assisi and Giotto to Puccini and Marconi, were of Northern or Central Italian stock—a truth that remains unpopular in Rome and to its south. Dante, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and a glittering galaxy of other poets, novelists, sculptors, painters, thinkers, scholars, and scientists were Tuscans; Raphael always spoke of Urbino as his "fatherland"; the many Venetians who achieved fame or notoriety include Marco Polo and the adventurer Casanova; Verdi was born in the village of Roncole near Parma. And Garibaldi, who came from Nice, never did get to like the Neapolitans toadying to him and his Thousand.

The Piedmontese officials who took stock of the Mezzogiorno territories that Garibaldi had conquered for their king were appalled by what they saw. They reported on the Deep South as if it were located on a different, dark continent. Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, the diplomatic architect of Italy's unification, never even bothered to visit the Mezzogiorno. (Cavour spoke French much better than he did Italian.) The southerners, on the other hand, quickly gained the feeling that they were not citizens of a new Italian state with the same rights and opportunities as the northerners but had become subjects in a colony.

To Italians from the North who were sent to the Deep South as administrators, tax collectors, police officers, builders, and salesmen, the region often meant exile in dusty villages, a diffident local population, chronic scarcity of water, and an atmosphere of stagnancy and provincialism with the pervasive though shadowy presence of a daunting power

called Camorra in Naples, 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, and Mafia in Sicily.

The national governments that succeeded one another in Rome, including Mussolini's, all promised to tackle the "Southern Question." But despite some spotty reforms under Il Duce, the Mezzogiorno continued to lag. When Fascist authorities decided that the Piedmontese doctor, painter, and writer Carlo Levi was a security risk and relegated him to a village in Basilicata, Levi was stunned by the primitive society and patterns of life he found there. The result of his experience was the forceful book *Christ Stopped in Eboli* (1945). The Jewish exile took the title from a local proverb implying that Christian civilization had never reached Basilicata but had halted at the town of Eboli near the Bay of Salerno.

After the collapse of Fascism and the end of World War II, the new Italian Republic also undertook to solve the "Southern Question," and by now public funds estimated at $150 billion (in 1989 dollars) have been poured into the Mezzogiorno. Several hundred miles of new streets and hundreds of bridges, many new schools and hospitals, and a network of modern hotels and service stations have been built, along with a few large, new industries, like the Taranto steel mills and the petrochemical complexes at Brindisi and on Sicily's east coast. Infant mortality and illiteracy have declined sharply (although in 1988 some 3 million adult southerners still could not read and write), and while the overall character of the Deep South has remained rural, its principal cities have greatly expanded. Their historic cores are now surrounded by vast belts of condominiums and new housing projects, many built in brazen defiance of zoning regulations; their streets are choked with traffic, and their air is acrid with exhaust fumes.

Nevertheless, the economic gap between the Mezzo-

giorno and prosperous Northern and Central Italy has widened. The per capita income in Southern Italy is still barely 60 percent of the average in the rest of Italy. At first the new industries in the South provided jobs for a few thousand workers, at least for a few years, but their products still lack a local market. Expectations that the new plants would generate many ancillary small and medium-sized enterprises in their areas have been disappointed. Italians speak of the solitary industrial giants in the Mezzogiorno as their "cathedrals in the desert." Some factories in the South were apparently built only to collect the lavish state subsidies for economic development in the region; they closed down after a few months or years, while the Mafia continued to siphon off billions of dollars in the form of kickbacks and protection money. Such illegal profits explain in part the many new cars and the garish new villas in the supposedly impoverished Deep South.

Today the Mezzogiorno—an area the size of Greece, inhabited by more than one-third of the 57 million Italians—has an official unemployment rate of nearly 20 percent of the labor force, against 8 percent in the North. The South accounts for only one-fourth, in value, of the goods and services Italy is turning out, its gross domestic product. Only Apulia, the flat and fertile "heel" of Italy, shows signs of an economic takeoff, spurred by thriving agriculture and many diversified small businesses. Perhaps most important, Mafia power is weak or absent in the area. Campania (the Naples region), Calabria, Basilicata, Sicily, and Sardinia, on the other hand, have remained stagnant and are infested by criminal gangs.

Many southerners are nevertheless convinced that they are smarter than the people in the country's North, whom they often view as plodding, mercantile, arrogant, and maybe really not too bright. *Cà nisciuno è fesso* (nobody is dumb

here) is a Neapolitan saying. People from the Mezzogiorno make shrewd lawyers, able administrators, sharp police investigators, and consummate diplomats; they may also excel in philosophical speculation or mathematical theory. The plays and novels of Luigi Pirandello, the Sicilian who won the 1934 Nobel Prize in literature, provide penetrating psychological insights into the Mezzogiorno.

Emigration has long seemed the best way of escaping the torpor, misery, hunger, and hopelessness of the Deep South. In the late 1940s I heard Alcide de Gasperi, then premier of Italy, remark in Rome one day that he could advise southern people only to "learn languages and seek a new life abroad." De Gasperi, one of the pioneers of the European Community, along with Robert Schuman of France and Konrad Adenauer of West Germany, was a native of the Trentino in the Alps and had little understanding of the Mezzogiorno. Before and during World War I he had been a deputy to the Austrian Parliament in Vienna; when his region became a part of Italy, he helped found the church-backed Popular party, and he weathered the Fascist dictatorship as a librarian in the Vatican. As Italian government chief from 1945 to 1953, he rarely visited the Mezzogiorno and seemed to distrust its potential for economic and cultural development, even though southern specialists, known at home as *meridionalisti*, kept insisting that the Mezzogiorno might one day become the "California of Italy."

Individual Italians, especially from the North and the center of the country, have always been intrepid travelers. The Franciscan friar Giovanni da Pian del Carpino, sent by Pope Innocent IV to the Tartary court in 1245, rode on horseback across Russia and Central Asia for more than three months to reach Karakorum in Mongolia and brought back

astonishing news about the immense East. Thirty years later the Venetian Marco Polo made it to China, traveling on the system of tracks, paths, and mountain passes that since antiquity had been known as the Silk Road of East-West trade. Polo lived at the court of Kublai Khan as a favorite of the Mongol emperor, but when he returned home in 1295 and told about Cathay, few people would believe him. The great Jesuit missionary and savant Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), a native of Macerata near Ancona, impressed the court of China's emperor by his learning and tact, and laid the groundwork for an eventually futile effort to reconcile Christianity and Confucianism. (The Vatican vetoed the Jesuit project, and the Roman Catholic church thereupon "lost China.")

Christopher Columbus was only the best known of many Italians who, in the service of various European powers, sailed uncharted seas. Columbus, probably a native of Genoa, knew about Polo's discoveries, and when he was exploring the coast of Honduras during his fourth voyage (1502) he believed himself to be in Cathay near the residence of the Grand Khan. Another navigator, the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci, also sailed from Spain and was to describe the "earthly paradise" that he said he had found on the Atlantic coast of South America. Amerigo was associated with the Medici clan and knew Leonardo da Vinci; his name was already in his lifetime (first in 1509) used to denote the lands of the Western Hemisphere.

Before and after the great Atlantic expeditions, Italians helped build the Kremlin in Moscow and erect churches and palaces all over Europe. Other Italians found employment as diplomats or artists with the Holy Roman emperor and at many royal and princely courts. In the Baroque age royalty and other wealthy patrons from Madrid to St. Petersburg employed Italian musicians, poets, singers, artists, goldsmiths, stucco workers, and other artisans. Pietro Metastasio, a native

of Rome, refined the Italian language during his long, productive years as the court poet in Vienna; the young Haydn learned much from the Neapolitan émigré composer Niccolò Porpora; Antonio Salieri, from Legnago near Verona, the fortunate rival and ambiguous friend of Mozart, was the teacher of Beethoven, Schubert, and Liszt; the Jewish-born Venetian Lorenzo Da Ponte wrote the libretti for three Mozart operas. Da Ponte eventually reached New York, taught Italian at Columbia College, helped found the first opera in the American metropolis, and died there in 1838.

By that time a trickle of Italian immigrants—a few hundred each year—were arriving in the United States. Like Garibaldi, who lived briefly in New York, many of the newcomers were Ligurians, and quite a few of them went to California, especially during the gold rush. Northern Italians founded wineries, fruit-packing businesses, and banks in that western state.

A mass exodus from Italy's Deep South started after national unification. Of the 4 million Italians who entered the United States in huge immigration waves from 1880 to 1914, and again from 1920 to 1927, three-fourths came from the Mezzogiorno. The immigrants from Italy took pick-and-shovel jobs, entered the building trades in force, provided manpower for the waterfronts, worked for municipal sanitation departments, became hairdressers or waiters (some scraped together enough money to open small restaurants or groceries—*grosserie* in their patois); the women became seamstresses in the sweatshops and factories of the garment industry.

Many of the men from the Mezzogiorno who had sailed in steerage to America had left their families behind, and a great number of them returned, sometimes twenty or more years later, when the children they had last seen as infants were adults. The hope of going back to the old country one

day to buy some property in the native village with one's American savings prompted most of the immigrants to settle near the East Coast seaports. Quite a few eventually changed their minds and had their wives and children join them. Although the bulk of the newcomers were originally from rural areas, they tended in the United States to cluster in cities and suburbs, forming Little Italies.

There were, to be sure, also thousands of immigrants from Northern Italy, especially from economically depressed parts of the Friuli, Venetia, Romagna, and Liguria regions. Yet the American perception of the immigrants from Italy, indeed of their entire nation, was above all shaped by the poor Sicilians, Calabrians, and Campanians. Most of them had lived in some village before embarking in Palermo or Naples and had never really known big-city life before they arrived in New York, went through the immigration mill on Ellis Island, and started looking for a cousin in one of the Little Italies, someone they had probably never met before but who would let them sleep on a mattress in the kitchen for a few weeks.

The Italian enclaves in American cities were themselves subdivided by invisible walls: Sicilians were wary of people from Avellino in Campania, and immigrants from one Calabrian village would not trust those from a village in the next valley. Statues of hometown saints were revered in the Little Italies like tribal totems and were carried around the neighborhood on the saints' feast days in parades that might attract curious and amused outsiders but annoy the local Roman Catholic bishop, usually an Irishman, and most of his clergy, who viewed the celebrations as relics of paganism. The dialects spoken in the Little Italies were incomprehensible to people from Northern Italy.

Many of the immigrants from the Mezzogiorno were total or virtual illiterates. Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, the

national government and Parliament, and the country's cultural heritage had no meaning for them. Their "Italy" was their own corner of the Deep South, and a local baron who owned the land, a carabinieri sergeant who would round up lads for induction into military service, the parish priest, a miraculous image of the Madonna, the traditional way of garnishing spaghetti with olives or seafood, and memories of family alliances and feuds.

"They are not Italians because they have never been," wrote Giuseppe Prezzolini in New York in 1931. "Here they have taken on certain American habits, but basically they have remained southern peasants, without culture, without schooling, without language. . . . They left Italy before being Italians. They have been here, and have not become true Americans." Prezzolini was a journalist and author, born in Perugia, who lived in New York for many years and taught at Columbia University; his observations betrayed the disdain of an Umbrian intellectual for uneducated southerners.

Many Italian visitors to the United States today who want to have a look at what has remained of the Little Italies make similar judgments. An Italian consul general in New York told me in the 1970s that because of his assignment he had to ride the ethnic circuit in the metropolitan area, attending Italian baptisms, graduation ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. "You wouldn't believe what I see and hear," he reported. "I don't understand those Italo-Americans when they start talking in what they think is Italian and actually is the dialect of some mountain village in Sicily or Calabria that their grandparents used to speak, interlarded with hybrids like *carro* [car] or *giobbe* [job]. They offer me espresso, and a bit of lemon peel is swimming in it!" The old Sicilian custom of having black coffee with a slice of lemon peel is largely unknown on the Italian mainland.

At first, many Americans were convinced that a sizable number of the Italian immigrants were in some way mixed up with secret and criminal societies, the Black Hand or the Mafia. Italian men were said to be insanely jealous, and one was advised never to glance too long at their wives, sisters, or daughters unless one wanted trouble. Unlike the Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, the newcomers from the Mezzogiorno seemed to care little for education and books. Hence the stereotype of the "dumb Italian."

As for the Irish, who also had to cope with much prejudice in the United States, when the Italians started arriving in force they found the Irish already entrenched in formidable political machines, in police forces, and, above all, in the Roman Catholic church. Southern Italians never had much clout in the Vatican, and the immigrants from the Mezzogiorno were producing few priests and even fewer prelates; the church hierarchy was almost exclusively Irish. Italian-Americans did get together in a maze of hometown, regional, and fraternal organizations, but there was never a united front. Political scientists from the old country who have surveyed the Italian-American communities point out that even now there is no such thing as an "Italian lobby" or an Italian-bloc vote in the United States.

Italian-American leaders often sound defensive, seemingly anxious to negate any tie to the mob; or they simply insist that "there is no Mafia." American media indeed dropped the term *Mafia* during the 1960s and 1970s, although it was at the time being officially used in Italy in a parliamentary investigation of Sicilian-based organized crime. In the 1980s the ominous word crept back in the United States, alternating with the phrase *Cosa Nostra*, an American coinage that at first sounded unfamiliar to people in Italy but through the press and films eventually found acceptance there too.

Glamorized by books like Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* and derivative movies, the fictional or real crime families with their Sicilian roots, their sinister patriarchs, pettifogging counselors, arrogant henchmen, and lethal "soldiers" seem to have filled some Italian-Americans with perverse pride. The offspring of immigrants from the Mezzogiorno had from their childhood been smarting from more or less jocular allusions to their presumed mob connections; now it seems the macho thing for some to swagger like a movie don. A few Italian restaurants call themselves "The Godfather." (Back in Italy, too, *trattorie* in various cities have sprouted such business signs as "Il Padrino"—Italian for godfather—or "Il Mafioso.")

The mafioso with a bulge in the jacket of his sharp pinstriped suit has undoubtedly remained a stereotype for Italian-Americans among their fellow citizens, along with those of the Italian waiter, pizza cook, tailor, hairdresser, longshoreman, and sanitation worker. Never mind that thousands of second- and third-generation Italian-Americans have become prominent in the arts and literature, in the media, in the judiciary, in industry and finance, and in politics.

True to the pattern observable in other ethnic groups, many children of Italian immigrants became uncomfortable with the outlandish ways and the accents of their elders. Sons and daughters of immigrants who would not speak Italian strove to drift into the American mainstream, to move out of the Little Italies, and often to marry outside their ethnic group. In the third generation of Italian-Americans, a nostalgic search for roots can often be observed: Some start to learn Italian as a foreign but faintly familiar language, follow Italian cultural activities, maybe travel to the old country to visit grandfather's hometown . . . and are outraged if they get stranded in one of the frequent Italian aviation or railroad strikes.

The old Italian neighborhoods that the socially mobile offspring of immigrants abandoned have not completely disappeared. In Manhattan, it is true, Mulberry Street has been all but taken over by an expanding Chinatown, but other Little Italies continue to prosper as newcomers from the old country fill the vacancies. Some traditionally Italian districts, like Greenwich Village in Manhattan or Park Slope in Brooklyn, have become trendy, attracting affluent people from other ethnic groups. "There is no street crime here," prospective home buyers are told. "The mob takes care of punks and muggers; these blocks are safe." Presumed Mafia control of an area has become a selling point in the real-estate market.

The quota system adopted by United States immigration legislation in 1924 restricted the influx of Italians, and Mussolini wanted his people to colonize his African empire rather than sail for America. After World War II there was a new large-scale exodus from the Deep South, but in a different direction. In a silent mass migration that made no headlines either at home or abroad, 6 million Southern Italians—nearly one-third of the population of the Mezzogiorno—moved northward. Most of them found jobs in Northern Italy, but hundreds of thousands went to Switzerland, West Germany, France, Belgium, and other European countries. There they provided manpower for big and small industries, went down into the coal mines, worked as ditchdiggers and bricklayers, as hotel maids and waiters, as cooks and gelato makers. Some—the *magliari*, from the Italian word for undershirt, *maglia*—sold cheap underwear from house to house, even if they knew only a few words of the language of their new countries. Many made good and became foremen in factories and construction firms, or were able to open their own piz-

zerias or restaurants. A few came as racketeers to extend the Mafia's tentacles into new territory.

During the 1950s, when the "Italian miracle" of explosive industrial development started in earnest, companies in the country's North sent recruiters to the Mezzogiorno to hire cheap labor for Piedmont and Lombardy. The subsequent arrival of millions of people from the Deep South irked many northerners. The newcomers complained about discrimination in the factories, where they seemed to get only the most tedious jobs, and about difficulties in finding any but substandard dwellings. In their new homes, the heads of these immigrant families were told by their children of hard times in school and by their wives of unpleasantness in shops and markets. All southerners in Turin, Milan, and the other industrial cities in the North seemed to have their stories of unfriendliness, of slights or outright hostility from the local population. In Italy's North the standard disparaging nickname for any native of the Mezzogiorno became—and still is—*terrone*, a word derived from *terra* (soil). The term is imperfectly rendered as "clodhopper." *Terrone* suggests less a yokel than an uncivilized but cunning fellow with dirty habits, a man who is clannish and may be a mafioso; a *terrona* is, to northerners, a primitive woman who doesn't use much soap. Because most of the civil servants and the personnel of the police forces in the North have roots in the Mezzogiorno, the dislike and distrust of the *terroni* blended with the general disaffection for the central government in Rome. In fact, for many natives of Milan, Turin, Genoa, Venice, or Bologna, *terronia*, the despised South, begins south of Florence. As early as the 1960s, sociologists and newspapers in Rome and in the real Mezzogiorno started denouncing northern "racism" and "intolerance," and today these ethnic antagonisms are a prime theme of public discussion throughout Italy. Northern Italy's antipathy for the Mezzogiorno finds increas-

ingly less subtle expressions. Newspapers in Turin, Milan, or Venice usually make a point of noting that an arrested robbery, burglary, murder, or rape suspect was born in Palermo or Reggio di Calabria and regularly theorize that a Sardinian-Calabrian crime syndicate was again at work whenever another of the North's frequent kidnappings is reported. (And these explanations all too often turn out to be correct.) When Mount Etna was once again spewing lava in the early 1980s, large graffiti reading FORZA ETNA! (Go Etna!) appeared on overpasses spanning highways near Venice. To the foreign traveler the inscriptions might have been puzzling, but every Italian understood the message: "Come on, Mount Etna, blow up real good and knock off a few thousand Sicilians!" One Sunday in September 1989, the crowded Verona soccer stadium erupted in an anti-Naples demonstration when the local Veronese team was playing the visiting Napoli eleven. The fans chanted: *"Terroni, terroni!"* And there were banners in the bleachers reading "Napoli, Welcome to Italy!" To gauge the depth of antisouthern feeling in the North, talk at random to a few native people there: You will be struck by the disgust with which many, even casual acquaintances, speak about their compatriots in the Mezzogiorno and about the Romans. The blandest comment will be that the inhabitants of the Deep South and of the nation's capital steal and squander the tax money that northerners contribute out of what they earn through their efficiency and hard work.

Several politicians in Northern Italy have tried to channel the widespread aversion to the Mezzogiorno into organized movements. Home-rule parties with such names as Ticket for Trieste, Venetian League, Lombard League, and Piedmontese League have sprung up since the 1970s and have won sizable slices of the popular vote in administrative elections. In their official propaganda such factions never use the term *terroni* but stress instead their determination to see to

it that the bumbling and corrupt government in Rome no longer meddle in local affairs.

The founder of the "Lombard League," Senator Umberto Bossi, explained the movement's drive for greater autonomy of the Milan region in a recent interview: "Think of our schools, the public administration: the southern ethnic group represents the majority there, monopolizing the structures of the centralistic state, the political forces, the government. . . . The bulk of the Treasury revenues comes from Lombardy. We have every right to protest when we see that these funds are being thrown out of the window to join the immense river of billions [of lire] that so far have not benefited the Mezzogiorno but the southern [criminal] gangs. It's as if Lombardy were handing its wallet to the Deep South."

Compassion swept much of such rancor aside in 1980 when a catastrophic earthquake hit a large area in the south of the peninsula, most heavily Campania and Basilicata. Television showed the ancient, poor towns on the harsh southern mountain slopes reduced to rubble, and old women, wrapped in black scarves, weeping for their dead. As if for the first time, northern viewers had to realize that not all of Italy was prosperous. In an outpouring of idealism and national solidarity, young people set out from Milan, Florence, and other northern cities to bring aid to the earthquake victims, and in some remote villages the northern volunteers were on the spot before the official rescue parties arrived.

The following years of reconstruction were less inspiring. The central government earmarked huge amounts of funds for the rehabilitation of the stricken areas—perhaps as much as $50 billion, although nobody seems to know the exact amount—and a good deal of the money seems to have been misappropriated. Local banks multiplied their assets and reaped interest, contractors profited, and politicians favored

their *clientela*. Nor is the sequel to the 1980 earthquake the only example of the squandering of taxpayers' money in the Mezzogiorno, and today impatience with that part of the country appears to be spreading in Italy's north, threatening to weaken further Italy's ever fragile national cohesion.